

felt knowledge

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Abstract

Bodies, inclusive of flesh|bodies and object|bodies, show the wear brought upon them by physical labour; the particularity of their history engrained upon the skin|surface of both sentient and non-sentient entities. Although the discrete life experienced by the object|body cannot be recalled mnemonically, the developments on a surface can be partially decoded, revealing an archive of gestures brought about purposefully and incidentally. Without the capacity for verbal expression, the archive of marks left on the object|body's surface cannot be relayed as a narrative of events. Instead, it is left to those with flesh|bodies to seek an understanding through touch.

As Elaine Scarry makes explicit in *The Body in Pain*, “what is ‘remembered’ in the body is remembered well”, and can be read by bodies that understand each other's situation as memory embodied. Although originally applied to conventional notions of wounds and bodies, any form of subtractive alteration to either flesh|body or object|body can provoke this empathetic response in the flesh, the touched body becoming an affective object with the potential to cause a felt response *within* others. Through touch, the bodies merge and dissolve the boundaries of their singularity, momentarily entering into shared understanding. In this way, the archive of trace left on surface is an ongoing experience of the labour that created it, perpetuating the act by grafting present and past together.

Dedications

*To DTB, who observes all things with such great curiosity
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felt knowledge

to work with thought

As man may lend his voice to the less articulate materials of work, so conversely those materials may become a surrogate voice at moments when he is speechless.
- Elaine Scarry

As the viewer enters the Special Projects Gallery at York University, they become aware of the distinct separation of two areas. To the viewer's left the walls are painted a warm charcoal gray, and a wooden table runs parallel to the wall that directly faces them.¹ Resting on the table, several palm-sized bronze sculptures are scattered, some weighing down two open white books. Collectively these sculptures form the work *cheirourgia*, cast from hands cracked and worn by the multifaceted gestures of labour. Following an inclination to flip through the books, the viewer must move these weighty sculptures, drawing them into their own hands. The density of the bronze begins to warm as it is held against palm and a relationship begins between skin of someone unknown and skin of the self. They begin drawing attention to the flaws worn into the viewer's own skin, with knuckle, line, and callous becoming more prominent.

The books paradoxically seem empty, and it is only in taking them into the hand and manipulating the way light falls across the surface of the page that the viewer begins to see faint details. *g(r)aze* opens with several white pages. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, words begin emerging from the paper, shadows highlighting the crests and valleys of a single word or phrase embedded into the page. Underneath, dependent on the quality of

¹ In this paper, I will refer to the singular viewer as them/they/their in hoping to abstain from gendered pronouns.

cast light, a shift of white ink reveals a definition. While reading through material in preparation for this support paper, I found myself working each text methodically: as I read, I colour coded passages and sentences in relation to major themes, drawn towards those authors whose thoughts sympathetically aligned with my own. One of these colours, “Burnt Orange”, became associated with previously unencountered or unknown words that rang as particularly pertinent once the definition was made explicit. *g(r)aze* acts as a personal dictionary of words and concepts connecting Jacques Derrida’s *On Touching* – Jean-Luc Nancy and the theme of touch within my practice.

The accompanying book on the table similarly highlights the quiet nature of the relationship existing between skin, paper, and touch. Slightly uneven paper passes under fingertip, and entire chapters are formed of silent pages with only broken flecks of words emerging from the matrix of the page. The viewer becomes aware, while thumbing along through the blankness of pages handmade specifically for the dimensions of the book, that each page repurposes previously printed paper. Using the same source as *g(r)aze*, *the sense of nearness* is composed of reconstituted portions of *On Touching*, broken up thematically as I related it to my practice. This process of tearing selected sections from their origin acts to unite my interpretation and thoughts as filtered through another’s writing; it calls back to my process of understanding *On Touching* and the other texts in which I visually differentiated passages by colours. Physically compiling these excerpts produces an entirely mute point – there is no text to read – which heightens the physical experience of the book. The only additional text written within the book is the chapter title at the beginning at each section. With each section named for the colour a particular

theme was assigned, each mass of pages make nearly-visible the relationships I found between *On Touching* and themes running through my practice.

As the viewer moves from this area to the larger section of the gallery, they move between two large-scale prints that face one another, as if in conversation, and engage with two prints (each 26" x 30") against the far wall in the gallery. Scratches scatter themselves unevenly across the printed surface of *desk work* and increase in prominence in the second state. The image captured, an interruption from one state to the next, is my own incidental engagement with a surface recorded over the course of four months, which has accumulated to seven months in the second print. By printing *desk work* in two states, the passage of time is made visible by the slow buildup of incidental and habitual marks distributed across the printed surface.

To the right, *untitled (106 relief)* hovers slightly away from the wall, the bottom of the nearly 4' x 8' latex print fluctuating in the draft created by the viewer's movements. Lifted directly from the surface of a worktable in the Print Media Studio at York University, the print holds and makes visible the residue left from those working at it. In areas where a high concentration of activity has taken place or where the deepest relief is experienced in the table, the latex darkens. In these places, the remnant residue on the table has mixed with the then-liquid latex, so that corpulent mass and residual material together add visual prominence. Each emptied, subtractive gesture on the table fills with liquid latex as layers are applied; once pulled back from the table, these pockets announce themselves as full, fleshy embossments.

Placed directly across the narrow gallery, *untitled (106 lithography)*, a 4' x 8' hand-embossed and hand-embroidered print hangs very slightly off of the wall. The white

satin thread entices the viewer in to engage at a variety of distances, each stance allowing the shift of thread against the white paper fiber to reveal details in both. Faint textures of wood grain create wavering shadows that fill the white paper, while the forms enhanced by embroidery freckle and cluster throughout the entire visual plane. Placed across from one another, each large expanse of material devoid of pronounced features invites the viewer in from further away, adjusting their experience of the printed surface as details reveals themselves. Although these two prints, *untitled (106 relief)* and *untitled (106 lithography)*, express themselves very differently, together they form my understanding of the object as body, and the surface as skin.

sensitivities are produced by encounters



details of *untitled (106 relief)*, and *untitled (106 lithography)*

These two printed works, shown here in detail, are not a metaphor for the subjective experience of human skin. Rather, they refer directly to the experience of a different kind of skin|surface, that of the object and the surface of a site. My conceptualization of the body is similar to the way in which Object-Orientated-Ontology situates itself towards the object as an entity; the body is an individual with a history that cannot be repeated, so in this way “testifying to [their] particular condition and fate.”² Proponents of OOO hold the position that objects exist prior to the relations formed with others, be they things or bodies, and are not masses waiting to be given meaning. Harman calls this objectification – giving objects meaning – ‘overmining’: we place boundaries around what an object is, and therefore limit the potential relationships and formations that this object or phenomenon can become or have.³ By actively withdrawing from

² Joseph Amato, *Surfaces: A History* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press. 2000), 40.

³ Timothy Morton, “An Object-Orientated Defense of Poetry,” in *New Literary History*: Vol. 43, No. 2 (Spring 2012): 208.

habits of ‘overmining,’ the world of entities, and in my case more specifically that of bodies, becomes less hierarchical. Within the context of my practice, and this text more specifically, I will be using the terms ‘object|body’ and ‘flesh|body’ to differentiate where necessary between the two, and ‘skin|surface’ to attempt a unification across their varying exteriors. Although I conceptualize both as occupying the same classification of ‘body’, they have certain inherently different attributes; in wanting to respect those, it is necessary to create a distinction. The flesh|body refers to a more traditional understanding of the body: skin, breath, blood, organs, thoughts, sentience. We shuffle through existence by means of our own agency. Object|bodies lack many of those characteristics, and are maybe closer to what we would normally classify as ‘things’: surface, chair, table, door, functional, stable, inanimate. Bodies, inclusive of object|body and flesh|body, show their wear as the directness of history is engrained upon the skin|surface of both the sentient and non-sentient entity. Although the history and felt-archive experienced by the object|body cannot be recalled mnemonically, the developments on a surface can be partially decoded, especially by those that relate to the trace mark as a gesture they have made, or one that exists within their skin. Without the capacity for verbal expression, the archive of marks left on the object|body’s surface cannot be relayed as a linear narrative of events. Instead, it is left to those with flesh|bodies to seek an understanding through what has been argued as the most primary of senses: touch.⁴

⁴ Within *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, Jacques Derrida cites a number of philosophers who have held similar thoughts on touch, from Marx to Merleau-Ponty to Kant. Overall, he places this primacy on touch because of the immediate knowledge of one’s surroundings that can be gathered through the tactile interface. I will discuss my own approach towards touch throughout this paper. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

As Elaine Scarry makes explicit in *The Body in Pain*, “what is ‘remembered’ in the body is remembered well,” and can be read by bodies that understand each other’s marked skin|surface as memory embodied.⁵ Any injuries inflicted, any marks left as trace, can be lifted from the site and in the case of the object|body, physically imprinted on a referent surface to be placed into alternative circumstances. By doing so, by presenting the skin|surface within a gallery or critical dialogue, an awareness is brought to the object|body which heightens the disruptions. Discussing the repercussions of the injured body removed from the context where the wound was inflicted, Scarry deconstructs the body as an affective object with the potential to cause a felt response *within* others.⁶ In viewing or touching the injured body, both enter into a non-verbal dialogue about the alteration of the body, with the non-injured body figuratively taking on the injury momentarily. It is in this moment of taking the injury of another into one’s body, through thought alone, that I argue an empathetic exchange has the potential to take place. Scarry builds her discussion of the body using an extreme example of injured bodies, those damaged in war; I maintain, however, that any form of subtractive alteration can provoke an empathetic response in the non-participant. Within my practice, as each print transports a specific archive of actions and damage into a new context, the object|body itself is brought into conversation with other bodies.

When I viewed Lisa Steele’s *Birthday Suit – with scars and defects* (1974) for the first time in 2009, I experienced a shift in how bodies relate. In the video taken on Steele’s birthday, she approaches the camera naked and relays the story behind each scar

⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 109.

⁶ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 119.

acquired on skin. Although Steele is absent as a full body throughout most of the filming – the picture framing often focused on a very small detail of flesh, with her voice frequently coming from outside of the camera frame – she takes the viewer on an intimate navigation of her body; running her own finger over the ridges of each scar, her voice translating the tale. In witnessing Steele’s personalizing of each permanent mark in her flesh, my own awareness increased of the scratch-scar on my left wrist from my first cat; a beginner’s biking accident on my right shin; the wineglass that found my right elbow on Boxing Day. Other less narrative scars also gained a presence on my body that muddled with the stories she was telling, finding them in a similarly with my fingertip and contemplating possible origins. Although her scars did not appear on my body through hearing her intimate retelling, or through viewing each close-up of fingertip running over ‘defect,’ I was imparted with a new way of relating to my own skin and the skin of others. I related to her felt experience as if it were my own, engaging my own empathies towards her body, and still further, to the bodies of others. The lingering sensitivity I experienced after my encounter with Steele’s work may not be present in everyone, so it is within the *potential* to relate, to connect, and to attempt an understanding of another body’s experience that I position my practice.

this skin holds the values and potentials of its referent body

Language reflective of the body has long been a part of my practice, in which I often refer to the unembroidered, embossed forms as scars and abrasions. “[W]ounds, scars, blemishes,” moles, freckles, protrusions, pores (and the porous surface);⁷ any papillae present in the prints begins fostering empathetic understandings between the object|body and the viewers’ hand and eye, pulling them into an intra-active relationship, body to body. Through touch, the intra-active bodies merge and dissolve the boundaries of their singular entity, allowing them to momentarily enter into a shared understanding while their skin touches.⁸ Karen Barad’s posthumanist approach to the way in which we enter and engage with the world parallels my thoughts about how empathy operates, and this will be explored within the last section of this paper. Although originally applied to conventional notions of the flesh|body, I argue that Scarry’s notions of “the visible and experienceable alteration of injury has a *compelling and vivid reality*” speak to a wider understand of the body, inclusive of the object|body.⁹ This argument will be addressed throughout this text, both how this takes place and what the resulting effects are.

⁷ Amato, *Surfaces: A History*, 40.

⁸ The term “intra-action” comes from Karen Barad. Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understating of How Matter Comes to Matter” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No.3 (2003): 817.

⁹ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 121.



site for *untitled (106 relief)*, a wooden table in the Print Media Studio at York University

The inanimate reality of the object|body accounts for its inability to regenerate in the same way the flesh|body does. As an inanimate object|body, the task of bodily maintenance and mending is left to others; those who interact with the surface of the object|body alter it, with both additive and subtractive applications and connotations. Within the broader context of my practice, my own gesture to help maintain and repair the object|body most clearly resides within the embossed/embroidered prints, which start with a thorough cleaning of the surface to be printed. By removing the existing surface dirt and stains, I am able to grant an extended moment of agency to the object|body, one that is free from the residue of habitual use. This in turn produces a clean printed surface to work back into with embroidery, with the paper often lifting any last remnants. Embroidery then recomposes the textures ingrained within the referent, and draws attention to a surface otherwise overlooked.

In the 1970s, Mierle Laderman Ukeles used the gesture of cleaning to call attention to gendered work performed by women and disregarded largely by society.

When she found herself existing outside of the paid-labour force, but nevertheless

working the full day around the home, Ukeles was compelled to create art that would highlight this discrepancy and inequality. She placed herself within the public sphere for a number of ‘maintenance art tasks’, including her performance *Hartford Wash: Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* (1973), which confronted the audience with the private act of cleaning. On hands and knees, she scrubbed the steps and floors of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, forcing attendees to consider her act as no longer disparaged and private, but a performative public gesture. Her role of activist for the disenfranchised extended towards increasingly dominant environmental concerns, in reaction to witnessing the effects of nature being rapidly compromised due to increased pollution and degeneration of resources.

As an artist-activist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles used the gesture of maintenance to call attention to acts performed by many but disregarded by the dominant forces of society. Similarly, my practice acts to highlight the gesture of use, one that is performed by others who may not recognize the direct impact left by those same gestures. Our gestures remain similar, but the motives are different; Ukeles’ practice asserts that her work *is* the work, whereas my work records and makes evident the lingering traces of others’ labour. These traces are indeterminately performed by transient communities, built up over the collective interaction with surfaces in studio spaces. The residual marks are then redoubled by my acts of cleaning and embroidering, which places an emphasis on the materialized trace of the gesture of labour. While the acts of preparing the object|body, and the embroidery on the referent print thereafter, can be understood as an interaction with the gendered nature of cleaning and mending in this manner, it is with a concreted intent to restore the surface that I perform them.



**detail of *untitled* (106 lithography) next to the printed site, a table in the Print Media Studio at York University;
hand-embossed and hand-embroidered BFK Rives paper**

Although cleaning can be understood as denying or removing certain expressions of the history of the object|bodies printed and treated in this manner, much of what I believe to inherently connect all bodies is deeper than the superficial top surface. The deep texture of these surfaces suggests greater potential for the uncovering of their individual histories, with the dirt existing generally as a visual distraction from the deep, historical texture. In *Outing Texture* Renu Bora contrasts conventional notions of texture with ‘*texxture*’ as it “refers not really to the surface or even the depth so much as to the violent, pragmatic, medium, inner level of the stuffiness of material structure”, revealing more characteristics of the object|body than the minimal narrative that superficial texture communicates.¹⁰ It is this heightened affective ‘*texxture*’ that provides an entry point, literally and metaphorically, for the flesh|body to begin understanding and relating to the object|body.

¹⁰ Renu Bora, “Outing Texture,” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 99.

Often, the marks left on the object|body reveal an unfinished surface where worn wood and removed lacquer exists. As with skin cut or scraped, “flowing continuously from exposed surfaces of the body to internal cavities,” uncovered raw matter has an inherently different corporeal relationship to other bodies.¹¹ Splinters in a wooden table create a new raw reality for the object|body in the same way a cut exposes a new corporeal experience in the flesh|body. Should the remove be deep enough across the skin|surface, the exposed layer begins to impede work from continuing, and this hindrance, this resistance, is experienced by both sentient and non-sentient bodies. A cut on my hand, for instance, may inhibit a practical motion made repetitively during the act of making, and so each time this motion is performed, the reality of the damage is felt in my skin. In thinking next of the object|body, which is meant to facilitate activities performed by the flesh|body, an indentation or subtractive alteration resists the fluid motions of repetition characterized by work and the architectural sturdiness associated with flat objects. This cut creates a disruption in activity that would otherwise not exist. It is within this suspension between motions that the flesh|body begins to understand the analogous damage to the object|body as injury, as wound.

My initial interaction with most object|bodies is through touch, tracing along the edges of the deepest gouges and the lengths of the longest cuts. However unknown the contexts with which the body received damage are, I begin to understand the object|body as individual through the tactile interface. Although sometimes bearing some similarity, each mark is unique to the surface it is embedded within; taken collectively, each object|body is distinctive. This method of familiarizing oneself with a surface is not

¹¹ Amato, *Surfaces*, 41. Inclusive of flesh|bodies and object|bodies.

something I have observed frequently in others, and so it is within the transposition of materials and context that this exchange of information begins. After I have encountered and cleaned the surface of an object|body, I carefully lay a dampened piece of cotton rag paper along the length of the surface. The paper, when pressed upon, begins taking the forms of the gaps and divots below. Because of the scale in which I am working, it is my own body's pressure that creates the embossment; I work directly on top of the surface, pressing paper down with a modified dowel tool and a felt blanket used as buffer to decrease tear-inducing friction. As I blindly trace along the marks below my hand and hidden from sight, the labour engraved upon the table is doubled by my own engagement with the surface.

Susan Lawson writes about the '*infra mince*' (ultra thin) in Rachel Whiteread's indexical sculptures; the mould process Whiteread uses creates a skin-like surface that transcends the object and the referent sculpture.¹² Whiteread's sculptures often engage with absent referent objects, making present the negative spaces they inhabit.

Occasionally, she engages with the surface of an anonymous structure, but also frequently works to make visible the space within or under the object. Concretizing the insides of buildings and areas underneath chairs (the latter project bares a debt to Bruce Nauman's work) there is a making visible of the domestic and forgotten spaces. Without the three-dimensional referent sculpture, my prints become the trace skin of similar sites,

¹² Rachel Whiteread works with large spaces, such as the places between bookcases, and full sized houses set to be demolished. My embossings take on a similar life-size nature; each of the table top prints will be approximately 8' x 4' and their size relates to the human form.

Susan Lawson, "Sensitive Skin," in *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, Chris Townsend, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 78.

a visual allusion to the moment of touch within my process and further activating the conceptualization of the body. When the print is pulled back to reveal the textural relief, it holds the forms of the incidental marks inscribed on the worked surface, much in the same way scar tissue appears. Similar to Whiteread's sculptures, the prints are displayed with the contact side facing the viewer; the subtractive-turned-positive surface changes the function of touch from feeling invasive to becoming tactilely inviting.

Texture is most persuasive when a physical interaction takes place, however, the narrative of the archive left on the skin|surface persists through sight alone. Relating back to the viewing of *Birthday Suit*, my mind began to take on the alteration experienced by another body into my own, with the *texture* of each scar informing how that would present itself within my felt experience. The reality of the "open body ... rushes unstoppably across [our] eyes and into [our] mind", becoming as much a part of our embodied reality as our own existence. This taking on of the other becomes more visceral when the observer physically traces the wound, "and having sensorially experienced the reality of the first, believes he or she has experienced the reality of the second."¹³ I am extending Scarry's conception of the body here to include both flesh|body and object|body alike, as the disrupted skin|surfaces are similarly felt within the sensitive viewer's body; it is in interacting with *texture* that the realities of each can be shared.

The fleeting surface, one of dirt and residue that can be wiped away, does not confirm the embodied sensation of the second body within our own body in the same way that *texture* does. Rather than providing more information about previous interactions, dirt speaks to the indifference that passes from active flesh|body to passive object|body.

¹³ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 125-127.

The desire to remove dirt has long been engrained in our society, with the idea of the flesh|body existing in dialogue along with cleanliness. As Scarry discusses in “Work and the Body in Hardy and other Nineteenth-Century Novelists” dirt is simply “matter in the wrong place”, composed of bodily and material discards.¹⁴ Interactions with dirt are often met with disdain because of a societal and cultural understanding of unclean objects being less worthy of our attention. The soiled state of the surface contributes to an affective disposition within the flesh|body that resists an interaction on a more compassionate level with the inanimate object|body. Cleaning the surface therefore furthers the potential for a physical encounter for those observing and engaging with the referent skin|surface for the first time.

untitled (106 lithography) is a full-bleed print with the embossment reaching each edge of the paper, no portion left untouched. The embossed forms that protrude from the sheet of paper are only a portion of the information embedded within the surface of the print; the rest of the space takes on delicate tendrils of wood grain mirroring the uneven nature of the object|body’s surface. Although a hand-embossed print of this size is a very physical experience, it is quiet; only the addition of the embroidery begins to reveal the breadth of labour embedded in the surface. Covering each of the protrusions as if they were a ready-made pattern, each straight stitch discloses the narrative of use covering the object|body, making present the alterations experience on the skin|surface. By leaving a significant portion of the paper embossed, and not creating a threaded tapestry of stitching of once-embossed paper, my intention here is to engage the shifts in light as the

¹⁴ Elaine Scarry, “Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists” in *Representations* No. 3 (Summer, 1983): 93.

viewer passes the length of the piece: raked light casts shadows which move across the slightest of details on page, contrasted against the shift in sheen of thread.

The embroidery itself is decidedly non-ornamental in its handling. By maintaining a certain level of intentional and comfortable refusal to engage with traditional embroidery techniques, I allow myself to come to each printed surface without connotations of decoration or embellishment. While I have learned through the process of embroidering several large-scale prints how to handle more difficult marks, I am able to sustain a method of working that pays attention to each mark as I move across the surface of the print with needle in hand. This ensures each embossed form is treated with as much individualized attention as the last, despite using the same basic stitching technique. The directionality of the stitch is similarly kept the same, so light casts evenly across the stitched surface, shifting uniformly. I purposefully keep the colour palette minimal; working with cream or white thread, the material shift creates a slight transformation revealed by the contrast of satin thread on matte paper. Blatant adornment, advanced stitching techniques or bolder colour choices would alter the way the prints are considered. In that case, the viewer could move away from reading the embroidered forms as a record of an unknown archive and towards appreciating the embroidered mark as image.

These three characteristics of my embroidery (the straight stitch, directionality, and minimal colour) work together to ensure that no mark is given precedence over the next. Coming to the already used object|body, I have no way of knowing which mark existed prior to the next; in keeping with this structure, all marks made are kept equal. This also activates more than one level of attention brought to the printed surface. By

keeping the thread sympathetically coloured to the paper and working in a singular colour ranging between white and cream, the embroidery is less likely to be interpreted as an applied design, and thereby increases the possibility of the viewer approaching the print to view it closer. Through the embroidery work I am fostering a sensitivity to the detail engrained in the surface, inviting the body of the viewer to enter into an intimate proximity with the object|body. At this adjusted closeness, where the *textural* narrative has the greatest potential to begin expanding our understanding of the body, relationships form between skin of flesh and skin of print.

Although the embroidery was originally conceptualized to be a metaphoric mending of the original surface, it has become a method of engaging in the archive of labour left on each surface. Because these particular prints are created on paper, contrasting to the latex prints I will discuss shortly, the cleansing of the surface functions towards maintaining the marked object|body as discussed above. Retracing all the subtractive marks on the object|body with my own additive mark on the printed surface creates a field '*sous rature*' – defined by marks that while crossed out or 'under erasure' paradoxically become more visually prominent due to the visual emphasis caused by the strike out.¹⁵ Usually applied to words in an editing process, the words treated with *sous rature* are both unnecessary and somehow needed, revealing why each word has not been removed entirely. My intention is not to 'delete' the mark, but to create a material counterpoint to the marks left on the original surface.

¹⁵ Hugh Silverman, *Continental Philosophy II: Derrida and Deconstruction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 156-157.

Embroidery raises the surface physically higher than embossed form alone, and at times works to fix the deepest of fissures as they push past the paper's physical thresholds. Metaphorically and physically elevating surfaces in this manner works to bring each object|body and flesh|body into conversation with other printed surfaces present. It also fosters the potential to bring the newly sensitized flesh|body into conversation with object|bodies outside of the gallery, those encountered predominately at the periphery of daily experiences.

Both *untitled (106 lithography)* and *untitled (106 relief)* are hung in such a way to reflect how my own body has approached the object|body most often; shifting them directly into an upright position. Repositioning the original surface from a horizontal, and therefore passive, orientation to the vertical makes the encounter between bodies more egalitarian. When the object|body lays flat, its agency is constantly in fluctuation, dependent on those working above and on it. By placing the printed skin of the site vertically, its utilitarian function in relation to the flesh|body is removed and the damage received on the object|body comes into the viewer's awareness, now casting shadow; now in front of the viewer. The marks, whether embroidered or represented in latex, continuously oscillate between skin-like and entirely other, relating to and distinguishing themselves from the skin of the flesh|body. Although the scale of these prints are clearly different than that of the flesh|body, it is the intimate nature of details that stops the upright print from becoming an overbearing experience.

neglect is apposite to perpetual output

In wanting to shift into a more bodily material, one that mimicked properties possessed by skin, I started working with liquid latex. Making use of the structureless consistency inherent to any liquid, I am able to apply layers slowly until a desired and stable thickness is achieved. *untitled (338N)* was the first print in my practice created this way. The original surface, a repurposed vacuum table used in screen printing, resulted in a fairly uniform print flecked with mole-like protrusions set out in a grid. Some of the vacuum holes have captured more existing dust and dirt than others; the side of the table more regularly interacted with has garnered heavily darkened spots due to this residual interaction. Upon closer inspection, incisions and cuts become more obvious. Lit properly, the latex print glows light honey amber.

untitled (106 relief), latex and residue, 96" x 48"



Expanding my practice to include latex was my way of embracing dehiscence, or the rupture at the point where the surface has broken. This tearing of skin|surface was at first problematic within my use of paper substrates, as paper maintains the qualities inherent to its own physicality despite being reshaped by the embossing process. Soaking rag paper and working with it in a dampened state helps to relax the fibres as they are pressed into the forms on the object|body, but does not negate the fixed amount of stretch the paper possesses. Often the deepest of subtractive marks on the surface of the object|body pushes the paper past this point, tearing through the middle of the formed embossing where the fibres are under the most stress. Liquid latex, applied in layers across the surface, allows for even the deepest and widest of grooves to be lifted into the referent substrate.

“Pliant, plastic and rubbery (...) [s]kin is a multilayered, multipurpose organ that shifts from thick to thin, tight to loose, (...) across the landscape of the body.” Latex applied to a skeletal structure, that of a table, echoes these properties of skin expressed in a written interview with Joseph Amato, writer of *Surfaces: A History*, and Ellen Lupton, curator of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum.¹⁶ The fluctuation in thickness on the referent skin reflects the amount of wear and use the object|body has been subjected to, with thicker areas becoming less transparent due to a buildup of latex material. In contrast to the material differentiated nature of the embossed and embroidered prints, I choose not to clean these surfaces. The latex adheres, mixes, and lifts the residue and any bits of debris, which then remain embedded within the printed surface once dry.

¹⁶ Amato, *Surfaces: A History*, 41-43.

By leaving the object|body as encountered, I am engaging with another way it has seen use, namely through neglect. Once I remove the print from the object|body, much of this residue remains embedded within the latex, leaving the object|body cleaner than before printing. Visually, the captured residue is opaque, darkening the naturally honey-yellow latex to deep amber within concentrated pockets of dirt and activity.

Jorge Otero-Pailos, an artist, architect and preservationist, is similarly interested in the conservation of soot that embeds itself within surfaces. In his latex piece, *The Ethics of Dust: Doge's Palace, Venice, 2009*, Otero-Pailos applied layers of latex to the side of the 14th-century built Procuratie Nuove. Not wanting to disregard the stain left upon the building by passing centuries, his intervention enabled the surface of the building to be cleaned while preserving the integrity of how soot, dirt and moss had settled. The language surrounding his process and final pieces are very indicative of my approach towards my latex prints: Harriet Gibsone referred to his impressions as “skin-like preservation[s] of the building’s dirt and dust” and as a “memorial” to the history of the space; Laura Raskin refers directly to *Doge's Palace* as a “pelt,” calling attention to the impression’s referential appearance to skin taken from something bodily.¹⁷ His works in latex are political in nature – by taking the impressions out of their original context, he calls attention to the act of preservation as a removal of this unwanted layer. What is lost in the act of traditional preservation tactics is the history experienced by the object or

¹⁷ Harriet Gibsone, “Artist Jorge Otero-Pailos to coat Houses of Parliament in latex,” *The Guardian*, August 29, 2013, Accessed July 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/aug/29/artist-jorge-otero-pailos-parliament-westminster>.

Laura Raskin, “Jorge Otero-Pailos and the Ethics of Preservation,” *Places Journal*, January 2011. Accessed 07 Feb 2015. <https://placesjournal.org/article/jorge-otero-pailos-and-the-ethics-of-preservation>.

building; it is by revealing this layer and literally placing a spotlight on it that he hopes to incite conversations about the culture surrounding the need for clean objects.

Interestingly enough, *Doge's Palace* was offered to the museum housed within the complex from which it was pulled, and the offer was declined.¹⁸ Despite his intentions, and the celebration surrounding the piece, the pollution-embedded pelt was still unwanted.

While Otero-Pailos work raises questions of the ethics surrounding preservationist work, I aim to reveal the history of use an object|body encounters over time. The hand-embossed and hand-embroidered prints engage with the physicality of accidental subtractive alteration, doubling the labour experienced by the object|body with the stitched mark; as a counterpoint to the pristine paper and satin thread, the latex prints reveal the sullied work surface as associated with the nature of neglect.

The perimeter of the object|body generally sees the most amount of work recorded through trace, with access to the middle often limited by the width of the surface; this becomes visually apparent when viewing *untitled (106 relief)*. With a one foot band of impacted surface surrounding the outer edge of the print, the physical manifestation of marks on surface directly speaks to how the table has been used, holding within it the experienced history of the object|body. Without a key or legend to help the viewer decipher this archive of marks, the printed surface still references the physical activity of cutting, gouging, and scratching.

Latex's fleshiness also begins to relate back to the body's ability to heal; scars form as skin sutures itself back together, discolouring slightly and changing texture as

¹⁸ Raskin, "Jorge Otero-Pailos and the Ethics of Preservation."

healing takes place. Similar to skin in the healing process, the marks in *untitled (106 relief)* present themselves as scars formed to unite two sides of a broken surface. The latex binds along the divided sides lifted from the skin|surface, becoming a darkened amber as it mixes with the raw material and lifts the textures across the uneven surface. As with the other printed object|bodies, the referent surface of *untitled (106 relief)* no longer appears as a field of marks creating irregular vessels capable of holding residue and dirt, and instead presents itself as raised, additive marks across the surface of the print.

This “materialized residue” of the ongoing interaction between flesh|body and object|body is the record of habitual and ongoing work.¹⁹ For the work that takes place on the object|bodies is not often a singular interaction, but of several continued over a period of time and potentially repeated by many disparate communities. Determined largely by their location, the work carried out on these surfaces is often within a finite range of motions, with the marks left reflecting this range. For instance, the prints from Room 106, the Print Media Studio at York University, reflect the variances within printmakers’ marks across distinct techniques. Separated into Intaglio/Relief, Lithography, and Screenprinting, Room 106 is inscribed with smaller sub-sections of gestures. Within each set of actions (gouging, carving, cutting, sanding, dragging, filing, etc.) there is an uneven distribution of marks across each of the surfaces present. Each surface is prone to a smaller set of actions as manifested by the interaction between the active body and passive surface. In this way, the individualized history of the object|body enters into a wider narrative containing other object|bodies who share similar pasts but remain unique.

¹⁹ Scarry, “Work and the Body,” 92.

The continuous and repetitious nature of such work marks the object|body, as it becomes an archive of not only the generations of bodies who have worked at it, but the shared traces between bodies. Rarely are the marks indicative of only two bodies in conversation during the process of work, but instead of many who have shared the surface, leaving their impressions to build upon what Scarry Refers to as, “the continuity of activity (...) in a prolonged state of interruption.”²⁰ As discussed above, often the actions an object|body’s surface is subjected to is within a certain range; although a surface is marred with the passage of many different people working at it over a wide expanse of time, their collective activities exist within a finite range and set of gestures. Scarry writes that the physical record indicates that “a small piece of one has broken off into the other, *that they have not disengaged* from one another as though that engagement has never occurred.”²¹ Therefore, it is the trace left on surface that creates an ongoing experience of the labour that produced it, perpetuating the act by grafting the two together. It is no longer only an interaction between site and flesh|body, but also an intra-action, one that is substantiated and continued by the materialized mark.

As one engages in physical labour, the body consents to being altered alongside material, and so alteration is extended to the flesh|body. By entering into a dialogue with work, *both* bodies become active: at once becoming ma(r)ker and record keeper. This intra-action between bodies is further implemented by the tendency to touch the referent print, reenacting the mark along the surface of the object|body with fingertips. As the hand of the viewer grazes the surface of the print, my own initial experience with the

²⁰ Scarry, “Work and the Body,” 94.

²¹ My emphasis. Scarry, “Work and the Body,” 93.

(now) absent object|body is mirrored, bringing all of our bodies into conversation at that precise moment. Consistently reengaging the narrative of the archive through touch continues the work performed between bodies, regardless of how distant the gesture is to the present. The nature of this touch is empathetic, connecting the two through a shared recognition of felt bodies, a point that will be addressed fully in the pages to come.

work reshapes, changes, alters the body that enacts it

As noted by Elaine Scarry, “[i]t is the essential nature of work to be perpetual, repetitive, habitual” and it is this reoccurrence that accumulates and subtracts across the surface of the body.²² The physical evidence of such may be left as a trace mark upon the skin; a scar may result from both the slightest of scratches built up over continuous exposures to similar actions or the deepest of incidental, one-time wounds. It is the trace inclusive of both ends of the spectrum that relays an individualized history across a surface of skin. Although marks left on the skin|surface may not be the direct outcome of manual labour, they are most often the result of an interaction between two (or more) surfaces. The nature of manual labour requires the body to interact either directly with the physical world or through the manipulation of a tool, which mediates the act performed.

Tools finesse the interaction we have with the material world, becoming extensions of the body as they replace the flesh: a vessel performing the cupped action of two hands, a knife assisting in a more precise tearing action, the shovel becoming a wider and more forceful scooping hand.²³ With regular use both the tool and hand are altered beyond the material actively being changed, the handle becoming smoother or grooved against the skin of the user. The body too is altered, broken or stimulated to grow as the tool becomes more natural within the palm. The impacted refraction that takes place between the body on material, and material on body, is then embedded in both. Scarry refers to this as “reciprocal absorption”: writing for long periods with a pencil results in

²² Scarry, “Work and the Body,” 102.

²³ Vilem Flusser, “The Gesture of Making,” in *Gestures* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2014): 44.

the formation of a hardened blister against my middle finger, just as the pencil wears away at the edges.²⁴ What is recognized as record of this work, this interaction, is the mark made by the graphite, but not the alteration of my hand or the pencil used. It is in this way that the embodiment of work happens without conscious awareness of the actions having had an impact.



cheir ourgia, on-going series of bronze sculptures, variable sizes between 1x 0.5x 1” and 3x 1x 1.5”

Like the object|body, the flesh|body suffers from the subtractive nature of physical labour interactions. These instances of subtraction are more immediately understood as wound because of their reality within living tissue. If exposed repetitively to the same motions the skin will “grow and develop in the direction of stimuli”, causing calluses to form as reaction to (over)use.²⁵ Even upon surfaces not immediately seen, this interaction takes place, between exposure and growth. During the process of pressing hand-embossed prints, my body experiences a number of strains. The length of my legs

²⁴ Scarry, “Work and the Body,” 106.

²⁵ Amato, *Surfaces: A History*, 43.

become sore from assuming a position in which the force issued from my upper back and forearms is optimized for my hand to hold the dowel which presses into paper. Wrists that have endured the same position for extended hours at a harsh angle begin to cramp. Shoulders and upper-back ache from carrying tension-created pressure. The pain felt in the days following is my body's way of expressing exertion, a reaction to overuse. Where my muscles are sore, tiny tears have occurred and accumulated, and these stimulate a growth mechanism to ensure that should these actions be repeated with similar gestures, my body will be more prepared. The labour I perform as inherent to my print process has had a distinct impact on my body.

There is a parallel experience for any flesh|body that is exposed to repetitive motions. Our hands, as “primary instruments for learning about the ins and outs of things,” navigate surfaces expertly, becoming sensitized to differences in texture and temperature.²⁶ Taking over for sight when the eyes cannot see, it is the hand then that is exposed to the benign, the pleasurable, and the harmful. Over time, as with object|bodies, these exposures create marks upon the skin; *cheir ourgia* makes this evident. Consisting of a series of marble-sized bronze sculptures, *cheir ourgia* is cast from the hands of those close to me. Using the Greek origin for the word ‘surgery,’ it translates into ‘hand work,’ reflecting simultaneously upon the process of making the marbles *and* the hands that I have chosen to cast: those with an embedded history of work upon their surface. Carefully manipulating the cast knuckles and abrasions, I have grafted portions from a single hand have been grafted upon one another, rounding out the sculptures to create a peculiar yet unified object.

²⁶ Amato, *Surfaces: A History*, 49.



Tom Bruce's hand (Summer 2014)

My father's hands, for instance, have manipulated the physical world for much of my life, creating houses for toys and people alike, and are now embedded with these countless interactions. His hands, like those of the sculptors, printmakers, writers, and cooks that now occupy my world, all carry with them their record of material interactions. Like the ability for some marks to be decoded into gesture on the surface of the object|body, some of the marks on skin carry with them a very particular history: scars from an accident with a bandsaw; callouses from wearing a ring too tight; a writer's callous, resultant from grasp connected the urgency of thought; and the dryness of skin exposed to the elements. There are countless other scars, abrasions, blisters and marks that do not carry the same immediacy of narrative recall, but they still exist upon the skin – held within the hand.

Sight operates through the sense of touch; textures (and *texxtures*) become more vivid to us because our hands have experienced them before, and our eyes recall the

tactile sensations for our mind. I see concrete, brick, plaster, and know what my fingers have experienced in dragging them across these varying surfaces. They may have different qualities and be located far from the first tactile experience but my hands, having felt similar surfaces, can compare this new surface against known ones. My eyes, with this felt knowledge catalogued and called upon, can narrow down the exact sensory experience an unknown surface may provide. By simply looking over the surface, I can recall to mind how these surfaces will likely feel *without* touching them. My optical experience of the world is embedded in the haptic.

The hand is the most predominant source of direct contact, as sensitive fingertips and palms lead us through the world. Vilem Flusser opens “The Gesture of Making” through discussing the hand as though it possesses its own intentions and curiosities. This kind of personification of the hand feels accurate, at least within my own experience of unknowingly – and sometimes unconsciously – tracing along surfaces. It is through the hand that the gesture of making is affected, with a pair of hands becoming a “reception, of taking in, of opening up” the objects they manipulate.²⁷ Hands create both inclusions and exclusions, divisions determined by the subjective grasp. We reach out and gather information by what our hand experiences, relaying immediate accounts of our surroundings without the mediation of word. Verbal narrative has the potential to distort, changing and altering an occurrence each time it is recalled; dialogue revises the memory of that which was experienced, and whether encountered first-hand or through a retelling, shifts take place in that memory. An account enacted through an investigative touch is more difficult to falsify; the sincerity of a gesture may be called into question, but the

²⁷ Flusser, “The Gesture of Making,” 35.

curiosity embodied by an inquiring hand relays texture (and *texxture*) quickly to the mind's eye. I know the difference between each pair of hands that have held mine, the flannel of my parent's guest sheets, the stiff wave in the fur of my dog who passed nearly two years ago. To describe what each of those have felt like would fall short of the experience under fingertip and palm. To touch is to compare against prior felt-knowledge, to inform and draw upon a memory bank of encounters with the physical world.²⁸

Because of this haptic-optic memory link, the hand, especially the labour-worn hand, is much like the surface of the object|body, a record of embodied and embedded encounters. In thinking about what the object is, Timothy Morton speaks of the form being/becoming memory; that objects become "records [of] what happened to it."²⁹ For myself, the hand is the most similar surface upon the flesh|body from which to cast, to pull prints from, because of its direct relation to the physical world. Both object|body and hand engage with actual surfaces and share in being ma(r)ker and recorder. In printing directly from the surface and working with 1:1 scale throughout any process of alteration, I am actively acknowledging the intimate and discreet nature of this archive.

If my practice works towards leaving an impression upon viewers, leading them to be aware of surfaces, bodies, objects around them, it is pertinent to nurture and maintain an attention to the small, the incidental, and the minimal within the printed work itself. Cast in bronze *cheir ourgia* participates in a particular dialogue of art making and

²⁸ This sentiment is something Flusser calls "the gesture of comprehension" one in which comparisons take place between the current object under hand, and ones previously held. Both the gesture of making and the gesture of comprehension start with the physical manipulation provided by the curious hand. Flusser, "The Gesture of Making," 36.

²⁹ Morton, "An Object Orientated Defense of Poetry," 220.

the monumental by way of material, but places the physicality of history within the hands of the viewer. Each unique, cooled mass reflects upon our own worn histories and the personal archive engrained within our bodies. It is within this connection brought about by touch that the physically altered surface begins to “constitute an enduring and ongoing discourse between world, body, and mind.”³⁰



installation shot of *cheir ourgia, the sense of nearness, and g(r)aze*

My coupling of *cheir ourgia* with the printed books *g(r)aze* and *the sense of nearness* is not accidental. The curious hand of the viewer wishing to read the books move the small sculptural objects, taking these partial hands into their hand, to grasp if only for a moment. This kind of comprehension is what Flusser refers to as “research”: where the understanding comes from within the object; inside and involved, as the object

³⁰ Amato, *Surfaces: A History*, 37.

becomes more intimately known to the manipulator.³¹ As boundaries of self dissolve through touch, we take the other onto and into our understanding of ‘body’ and this fosters a level of knowing more intimate and meaningful than looking alone provides. When casting my full left hand for the first time, the existence of a hand so clearly mine, but not attached, produced within me a level of self-awareness that left me uneasy. For days after the first casting, my wax hand lay underneath a blanket, as I was unable to grapple with the otherness within and without myself. Although this kind of reaction is not likely to be experienced with such intensity by those encountering an entirely other hand, it is my hope that the similarities between skin-of-self and skin-of-other activates the differences of archives embedded within their own hands.

Karin Sander’s work has long been interested in activating attention towards the latent properties of existing materials. In an interview with Harold Welzer aptly named *On Making Things Visible*, Sander says, “[...] the work must both reveal something and also remain mysterious. It must transcend itself and gesture towards something that was not previously visible.”³² In this regard, Sander’s very minimal *Wallpiece (in Three Parts)* (1994, 1995, 1996) is most revealing. Removing the slightest amount of material from the gallery wall, sanding it down with progressively finer grit, she creates a polished surface with a preexisting context. At nearly 10’x13’, the largest *Wallpiece* becomes a mirror, activated by the reflection of the viewer as they pass by and interact with the glancing light. Rendering the polished section pristine simultaneously calls attention to the remaining wall surface, with all of the slightest imperfections contrasted against the

³¹ Flusser, “The Gesture of Making,” 40.

³² Karin Sander, as interviewed by Harald Welzer, “Harald Welzer and Karin Sander: On Making Things Visible,” January 1, 2002, <http://www.karinsander.de/index.php?id=e5>.

smoothness of her intervention. I feel connected to Sander's practice of distorting or disrupting the preexisting surface by creating simple material shifts; *cheir ourgia* presents skin as recognizable in texture but not entirely in form, and once presented in contrast with the viewer's hand, creates a relationship between surfaces similar to that of Sander's *Wallpiece*. In a broader context, it is her interest in heightening the visibility of the preexisting that draws me towards her practice, expressively exploring this within my own.

subtleties amplify parallels

With a heightened sensitivity to surface, the incredibly quiet books *g(r)aze* and *the sense of nearness* both engage with written text. As I described previously, they use the same source material, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, but engage with the words differently. *g(r)aze* is a portmanteau of ‘graze’ and ‘gaze’, highlighting the relationship between touching and seeing. As I worked through the text, I left marginal notes to myself, highlighting the beauty and precision of the vocabulary used. These two words in particular are stippled throughout the text, becoming somewhat synonymous with one another, at once reaffirming the relationship between seeing and touching. Within one chapter, “Tangent I,” I scrawled numerous variations highlighting the similarity between these two words.³³ Each word curated from the source text is embossed into one page of *the sense of nearness*, acting as a vessel capable of carrying potential relations between the words themselves and my practice. In order to access the definition, one must physically alter the way light rakes across the surface, shifting the white printed definition in and out of sight. The embossed word remains accessible no matter the lighting, emphasizing my personal understanding of the tactile-optical relationship.

the sense of nearness further abates the accessible nature of sight, removing nearly all of the textual information provided by the original pages used to make the pages within the book. What remains of any word is strictly by chance, for the process of making paper from printed pages has for the most part obliterated the passages. With

³³ This was written within my own copy of *On Touching*, between the pages of 146-147. It has since been destroyed, reconstituted into the piece *the sense of nearness*.

such minimal amounts of accessible text-based information, it is only the index and following chapter-title pages that provides the names of each colour and their correlation to a theme that informs the reader of what lies within. It is through the mass of pages and chapter headings alone that the reader is able to access my understanding of the source text. For example, “touch” was represented by the colour named “Mauve Shadow” and is one of the largest chapters in *the sense of nearness*, itself a phrase taken from *On Touching*.³⁴ When compared to other chapters such as “body – baby blossom”, “touch – mauve shadow” makes visible, through the number of pages presented, my high degree of attention towards touch-related passages within the original text. Uneven and slightly rough owing to its hand-made nature, the surface of the page is the majority of the visible work, a simple heightening in the tactile experience of paper. Our casual understanding of ‘page’ – as commercial bond paper, newspaper, glossy magazine – is shifted by the direct interaction of the handmade book, with the time spent viewing such a minimal book reflects the search for fragments of legible text. Priming the viewer’s senses with immediately relatable flesh|body textures and paper which varies from our collective comprehension of ‘page’, the congruent displaying of *g(r)aze*, *the sense of nearness*, and *cheir ourgia* evoke the kind of attention needed for viewing the object|bodies.

Touch produces an interactive account of one body in relation to another, with the object|body or skin|surface being granted the same ontological status as an other’s flesh|body.³⁵ I feel along the ridges of a gouge taken out of a table and my mind recalls the kind of gesture that might have made it. In this instance, my prior knowledge and

³⁴ The colours are not arbitrarily named, but reflect their official naming by Copic Markers. Derrida, *On Touching*, 95.

³⁵ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 125.

application of carving techniques connects me to the gestures that produced the marks. As when one watches someone kick a ball or perform any simple physical action, the mind mimics the gesture without needing the body to perform them. Similarly, as my finger traces a wound, in the object|body or flesh|body, I understand what that might feel like in my own body. My consciousness is altered just long enough through this taking on to empathize with the skin|surface in front of me. With the physical world sensed most immediately through the surface of the skin, it is by combining the physical experience of our body with another skin|surface that moments of empathy can be induced. This intra-action, performed by touch and succeeded by thought, forms a moment in which we can begin to understand the other, and the status of ‘body’ is granted to ‘object’. It is through touch that the boundaries of my body are dissolved to include the body of another, creating an intra-action that exists only in that moment. By relating physically, and therefore directly, with the object|body that the “[r]elations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion are reconfigured” to include the other within us.³⁶ It is this experience of (re)configuration that we carry with us afterwards, as it grafts itself upon our understanding and influencing future interactions with object|bodies.

This intra-action sets us into a moment of being present with the object|body. When we are obliged to be elsewhere (mentally, physically, emotionally, intellectually), it is difficult to maintain an active engagement with the things in front of us. With touch grafting two bodies together, be they of the same kind or different, there is a solidifying of the present. We perform an unconscious cut, a pause in our normal relationship with all that is exterior to our physical boundaries and become present with that which is in

³⁶ Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 817.

front of us. In reflecting on the archived gestures captured on the skin|surface, I sense myself starting to understand something about the nature of what is in front of me. If, as Timothy Morton suggests, that the “present is hollowed out by the ‘past’ and ‘future’” it is possible that this carved out presence acts as a vessel for the moment. We occupy the present only through the apprehension and comprehension of that which is immediately in front of us. The slow cleaving of time provided by the delicate details within my printed surfaces allow us to fully occupy the intra-action, entering into a ‘becoming’ that renegotiates ourselves, however slightly, from that moment forward. By entering into this space, we embody not only the object|body but the moment, centering ourselves as comprehension becomes fullest.

Sympathy displaces the experience of the other from us; it is a hierarchical account of understanding that maintains a displacement between what has been occurred within one and only fathomed by the other. Empathy, on the other hand, is experienced only when our mind occupies the body of the other – an embodied understanding. Leslie Jamison opens *The Empathy Exams* by explaining how empathy has become a technique taught to medical students, used to humanize the bodies they care for; to ensure that they treat their patients as people instead of specimens. Yet it is also employed in order to gather information from them. Through the insights concluded by interacting with patients conversationally and witnessing the smallest of details in their behaviour, the inquisitive arrive at the most comprehensive understanding.³⁷ This in turn nurtures compassion. I am not suggesting the use of medical analysis towards an object|body;

³⁷ Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams: Essays* (Minneapolis Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014) iBook edition, 19.

instead, that empathy can provide the knowing of the other which is otherwise beyond our capabilities. The rest of the text takes the reader along Jamison's journey to understand medical conditions that are frequently undiagnosed and unrecognized by the medical community. Through a first person account, she questions her grasp on reality after attending a conference for those afflicted with Morgellons Disease, an unseen and unacknowledged condition in which fibres similar to velcro are thought and felt to come through the skin. These unseen fibres frequently cause those with Morgellons to start scratching and digging into their skin, in hopes of finding the irritant and present physical evidence to the medical field, which has neglected to recognize it as more than a figment of the mind. Having conversed with those attending the conference, and having understood their suffering caused by the condition, Jamison starts to feel similar sensations. Her reality is altered by encounters with afflicted bodies around her.

Recently, I was recommended Rebecca Solnit's book *The Faraway Nearby*, an autobiography detailing a dispersed and nonlinear timeline of medical, familial, and travel-filled events. The topic of empathy reoccurs in each section, detailing slowly and poetically how once activated, it broadens the sense of self beyond the physical.³⁸ The body can only care for something in so much as it can feel the wound inflicted, both on itself and within another. Solnit returns to the extreme example of leprosy throughout the text, detailing how it numbs the extremities and that it is not the disease, but an inability to feel, which begins the physical disfiguration often associated with it. Empathy acts as

³⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 148.

an adhesive, bonding experiences across bodies and extending the self into bodies unable to feel for themselves.³⁹

What is maybe most revealing of both Solnit and Jamison's texts are that they place our reading of empathy within their experiences of others. The reader's empathetic reactions are registered against – mimicked by – the experience of each writer's interactions with burdened bodies. Not having known the afflicted, it is my reaction to the writer's experience that opens me up, as if empathetic responses were transmittable.

³⁹ Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*, 102.

intentionality

The object|bodies that I choose to print are places and objects in which and at which I have worked prior to printing. As alluded to above, they are often a shared surface encountered by many, and are spaces I too have used to facilitate work. By ensuring that I am also embedded within the object|body's history I avoid appropriating the object|body's narrative, or imposing my presence onto it without having already established familiarity. This also allows for me to further empathize with the skin|surface, having witnessed both my own work directly and the work habits of others vicariously.



detail of *desk works* (state two)

In wanting to explore the impact and traces of my own habits, I coated an intaglio plate roughly the size of the desk I write at (or more accurately, the portion not covered by papers and books). This was then the surface I worked on for a total of seven months;

writing, meeting, reading, editing. From mid-September forward, I battled with myself to maintain these habits as they became increasingly visible, new flakes of copper showing through deep-brown resin each time my keys skid across the my work surface; each time I adjusted my laptop further this time, closer another, to my body as I wrote; each time my palm heated the resin from the edge of the plate, removing it small smudges at a time. These are the similar, yet variable, motions performed by many, across different desks and surfaces alike, but not thought of as having had an impact. The surface of the coated copper plate, especially susceptible to the accumulation of even the most discrete gestures, expresses the record as recollection of such motions. Conceptualizing the project as existing with two states, distinct prints produced using the same plate, I have captured only remnants of the work performed over top; it is not the projects produced or the papers written that are presented, instead only the archive of minute gestures across my work surface. Not as visually prominent as the marks distributed by many over an extended period of time and left upon the object|bodies printed for *untitled (106 relief)* and *untitled (106 lithography)*, *desk work* offers an understanding of how a materialized archive begins with an individual's interaction with surface.

In May of 2013, at the soft opening to my first solo exhibition which contained my *suite series* – prints lifted from my varying residences held during my tenure in Lethbridge Alberta – I watched a woman with salami in both hands approach one of my prints, *untitled (204B)*, tuck the meat against her palm, and pull the print from the wall. I stood there, mouth agape and with the curator's partner failing to calm me, as she felt the front and then the back of my embroidery. Having experienced colleagues and family ask

if they could feel these prints, I was shocked by the act of a total stranger imposing themselves upon my work. Months later, I watched from a distance as new professors and colleagues would have similar immediate reactions to the embroidered work, reaching out to feel the thread, then paper, with an investigative touch.

These observations started conversations, internally and then as well with others, that made me question the nature of what the embossed/embroidered prints evoke – iterations of the body, the archive, Braille, cartography – all notions that implicated a direct, embodied relation to the viewer in some manner. The broken or inaccessible narrative within the skin|surface of the print enmeshes the viewer; whether they approach apprehension through a physical interaction or an internalized dialogue, they enter through contemplation and hopefully depart with an adjusted apprehension of the surfaces around them.

This relationship does not need to take place through physical touch, but I have argued here that touch strengthens the dynamic between skin|surface and viewer. Providing an alteration within the viewer, or in simply mimicking my own initial interaction with the referent surface, touch reinforces the bond between the two, and in that, the potential for activating empathetic feelings and compassion towards the unknown or undetermined. None of the pieces here depend on physical contact for full comprehension, and encouragement of such an act is not made explicit, as each viewer should relate as they feel compelled. If I wish to extend some form of agency or affective position to surfaces neglected because of their relation to physical labour and material output, I must also extend that same consideration of connection to the viewer.

Whether *cheir ourgia* has enhanced or disturbed the viewer's relationship with skin, or when standing between *untitled (106 relief)* and *untitled (106 lithography)*, they begin relating these two surfaces to surfaces they interact with daily, my aim is to create work that transcends the experience within the gallery and shifts attention to a broader context. The trace records of labour presented across the majority of the prints within this exhibition aspire to evoke a consideration of how the body is altered by the perpetual, the mundane, and the monotonous task, extending the category of body towards the object, which is in turn analogously modified by the habitual, the repetitious, and the incidental.

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